

SOME NOTES ON GAMAN HEVISI (MARCH BEATS)

An aspect of Sinhala Drum Music of Sri Lanka

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Hēvisi or drumming forms a nucleus of traditional Sinhala music in Sri Lanka. It is a combination of five musical instruments namely: 1. *Dawula* (a barrel shaped drum), 2. *Tantmeṭṭāma* (a species of the kettle drum), 3. *Horanēwa* (Temple oboe), 4. *Tālampōṭa* (cymbals) and, 5. *Hakge-ḍiya* (Conch), collectively known as *PANCAṬŪRYA NĀDA*.¹

The *Hewisi* has a twofold function in the Sinhalese-Buddhist society viz:

1. As a temple ritual
2. As a social custom

In the first instance, it is essentially a temple drumming, the drummers confining themselves to a especial place in the temple known as the *Hēvisi Mandapaya* or Courtyard of the drummers. A *Mandapaya* of this type is seen in the *Palle Māle* or the lower chamber of the temple of the Sacred Tooth-relic in Kandy, Sri Lanka. In its part in temple ritual the drummers perform in stationary position. They also perform while moving which is called *GAMAN HEVISI* as in a *Perahera* or *Pinkama*, a religious procession where a relic of the Buddha or a sacred book containing the *Suttas* or discourses for chanting (*Pirith*) is carried. It is also performed when Buddhist monks are taken in a procession (*Pinkama*)* to an alms giving (*dāne*). These are purely religious functions.

In the secular sphere *Hewisi* is sometimes utilised to-day for taking the politicians in a procession (*pelapāliya*) to a political rally. In the past, great warriors were taken to the battle field to the accompaniment of

**Pinkama* means a meritorious deed.

Hēwisi. In this instance, the drumming was called *Rana-bera* or war drums. This is also a variety of *Gaman Hevisi* when the drums were used to accompany a funeral procession (*Mālagama*) the drum beats of a slow tempo called *Mala Bera Gehima* or sounding of the death drum could be heard.

The aim of this paper is to record some of the *Gaman Hevisi* or march beats played in these processions namely a *Pinkama*, *perahera*, *pelapāliya* and a *Malagama*. Here we make a distinction between a *Pinkama* processions of small scale compared with a procession of larger scale known as *Perahera* which includes elephants, dancers and drummers. A *Pelapāliya* is a political procession. *Peraheras* are also performed in honour of a ruling monarch or a Head of state. In this case it is called a *Raja-Perahera*.

The *Gaman Hēwisi* tradition with a large variety of drum rhythms is fast disappearing. At least few of them are preserved because of important religious functions and rituals. The annual *Esala Perahera* celebrated throughout the country in the months of July/August is one instance where the traditional drummers from all parts of the country participate.² The most important and glamourised celebration is held in Kandy and the present notes on *Gaman Hēwisi pada* sometimes called *Gaman Hewisi Mātrā* (march beats) were made during the *Esala* festivals held at Kandy, Hanguranketa, Embekke, Pasgama and at Ridi Viharaya in the Kurunegala district in the months of August and September and during the *Raja Perahera* held in October 1981. The bulk of the material is drawn from the main festival held in Kandy.

Before we discuss about the varieties of *Gaman Hēwisi Pada* played at various religious and secular functions, it is necessary to give a brief description of the five musical instruments which constitute the *Hevisi*. *Dawula* as mentioned above is a barrel shaped drum which is about one and a half feet long and about 13½ inches in diameter. The hollowed barrel is made out of either of *Ahala* (Cassia Fistula), *Kos* (Artocarpus Helero Phyllus Jak) or *Kohomba* (Mangosa) wood. The skin used on the two sides of the drum differs, a monkey skin is used on the right side of the drum and cowhide on the other. It is played with both hands, the right hand of the drummer wielding a stick. This drum has ropes known as *Warapota* strung across the bar and they help the tuning. The *Dawula* is usually accompanied by the *Tammāṭṭama* i.e. a small pair of drums similar to the kettle drum with two eyes. It is played with two sticks known as *Kaduppu* and each has a knot at the end. The diameter of each eye of the drum differs again. One eye is 8½ inches and the other 7 inches and the height of the drum is about 7 inches. The *Horanawa* or the oboe is always an accompaniment to the above two instruments. It is about 12 inches long and it has seven holes which produce about three different notes or *srutis*. The cymbal or the *Tālampota* is identical to the Indian cymbal and so is the *Hakgediya* or the conch.

The Kandy Esala Perahera consists of five peraheras, each being devoted to a temple or deistic shrine. The Main *Perahera* which leads the procession is the *Perahera* of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth relic. (*Daladā Māligāwa*). It has about forty to fifty drummers altogether and the remaining deistic shrines namely: *Nātha*, *Vishnu*, *Kataragama*, (Skanda) and *Pattini Devales* have about twenty five drummers each. Conch blowers generally do not accompany the *Perahera*. However, one or two cymbal players and oboe players are associated with each group of drummers. The rest are mainly *Dawul* and *Tammattama* players.

The drummers at the Temple of the Sacred Tooth relic will assemble in two rows at the *Hēwisi Mandappe* ready to accompany the relic casket or *Dhātu Karanduwa* out of the temple and place it on the elephant with an offering of drum sounds or *Shabda Pūjā*. When the auspicious time arrives they commence the *Hewisi* with a beat known as *Hēwisi Pirīma* or the Commencement of the *Hēwisi*. The rhythm usually played at this moment is as follows:

Jengak Jen Kutu.....Jen Jen.....Kutu...
 Jen Jen Jen.....Jen...Jen...Kutu Kutu
 Jen Jen
 Jegu Jegu Jegu Jegak Jegata/ / /
 Jen Kru Jen Jen Kru Jegak...../ / /
 Kadataka Jen Jen Jengak Jen...../ / /
 Jenkutu Jen Jen Jenkru Kadataka Jen Jen
 Jegak Jen Kru Jega Jen Jengak Jega rujegak Jega Jegata Jega rujegak Jen
 Jega Jegak Kita/ / / rujegak Jen tarikiti Jenga
 Jegakkita Jenga Jengata/ / / Rujegak / / / / /
 Jen Jen Jen.

With this they take the relic casket to the elephant to the accompaniment of the march beat, normally played in a *pinkama*. This is observed in other *Dēvāles* or deistic shrines at the time of taking out the golden ornaments or *Dēvābharana* of the gods and deities. This *Gaman Hewisi Pade* is played as follows:

<i>Dawula</i>	<i>Tammattama</i>	<i>Dawula</i>
Jen Jen Jen	Kittak	Jen Jen Jen

When the *Dhātu Karāṇḍuwa* and the *Dēvābharanas* are placed on the elephant at each temple or shrine, the drummers play a *pūjā pade* or a beat of offering which is distinctly different from the march beat. When

this is done the group of drummers, beating their usual *Gaman Hēvisi Padē* (as given above) walk to the place assigned them in the *Perahera*. Now it is time for the *Perahera* to move, but they have not yet got the signal. The rest of the drummers now pay their respect to the chief of the drummers (usually a Dawul player) known as *Pradhāna Panikkayā*. They all go to him and bow with folded hands. Once they have paid their respect, the chief drummer starts the *Perahera* drumming by playing the *Hēvisi-pirīma*. The drummers will now observe the *Māligawa* elephant carrying the *Dhātu Karañduwa* and coming out of the temple through the main entrance which is decorated with a moon stone or *Sandagala* to participate in the *Perehara*. In the past the drummers at this moment played a rhythmic march beat to three steps (*tun aḍiya*) as follows:

Jen rujen tak/rombijin takata/jikata takata rujen/.

It is believed that the elephant carrying the *Dhātu Karañduwa* places his feet according to this beat. This march beat is not heard now a days in the *Perahera*. Instead the chief drummer with the others form a circle in a rhythmic dance and play a special *Hewisi* known as *Vata Hewisiya* or circular *Hewisi* rhythm. Until the signal to move on is given, the chief drummer with the other drummers go on playing intricate rhythmic variations. The drum beats played at this time exhibit the skill and the art of drumming. They are not *Gaman Padas*, but highly elaborate drum beats allowing one another to compete and they are known as *Attiyā Bera*. Once the signal is given to move on they will change the rythm again to the *Hewisi Pirīma* or commencement. Having completed the *Hewisi-Pirīma*, it is now time for the drummers to play their march-beat to the accompaniment of a rhythmic dance by themselves according to a *tāla* or timing indicated by the drum beats. In response to drum beats, the footsteps of the drummers vary from *de-adiya* (two steps) to *tun adiya* (three steps).

Some of the march beats (*Gaman Hewisi Pada*) recorded during the *Perahera* are given below:-

1. Jen Jegak Jen/Takkata Tarikita
2. Jegata Jegan/Jegata Jegan (played both as a fast beat or *dhurutalaya* and as a slow beat or *Vilambalaya*)
3. Takarombi Takajin/Takarombi Takajin
4. Jen Jen Jen/Kiti Kiti Taka/Jengada Jengada Takkita
5. Takkata Jikkata Takkata Rujin/
6. Jenga Jegata Jega/Takkata Kititaka/Takka Takkita
7. Jen Jega Jen/ / / Takkita Domikita Takkita Ta
8. Jegata Jegata Jegata Jegan-(played both as a Vilamba and dhruṭa)
9. Jen Jega Jega/Jegata Jegan/Takata Takata Takata/Takan
10. Jen Jegakkita/ / / Takkata Tarikita
11. Jen Jen Jengak/Takkata Tarikita

12. Jen Jen Jen Jen Jengata Jengak
13. Jen/Rujin Rujin/Gak/Takkita/Jen/Takata Takata Takata
14. Jegata/Takata/Takata/Takan
15. Jen Jen Jengak/Takaron/Takaron
16. Jen/Rujin/Takata/Jen/Rujen/Takata
17. Jengada Jengada/Jengada Kittak.
18. Jenga Jegata Jegata Jegan/Jegata Jegata Jegan
19. Jegan/Jegan/Takka Takita
20. Jengada/Takkata Takkata Takan
21. Jen/Takkata Takkita Jegan
22. Jen Jen Jen Jen/Tarikita/Jen/Takkata Tarikita Taku/Jen
23. Jengada Jengak Jengan (both Vilamba and dhruta)
24. Jegak Jegak/Takata Jegata/ / /
Takata Jikata/Takata Rujen/
Jegata Takata/Jegata Takata
25. Jengada Jengak/Jen Jen Gan
26. Jengada Jengak/ / /
Jen Jen takkita/
Jen Jen Gan/
27. Donga Takka Takka Takata
28. Jen Jen Jen/Kuta Kiti Tak/Tarikita
29. Jen Jen Takkata/
Takkata Takkata Tarikita
30. Jenga Takka/Takka Takita
31. Jen Jegak Jen/Takkita Tarikita
32. Jega Jegakkita/Jega Jegakkita
33. Takkata/Takkata/Taka/Jen
34. Takkata Takkata Taka/ / Takkata/Jen

During the *Perahera*, when one of the above *Gaman Hewisi Mātrās* is changed to bring in variety (*Pada Māruwa*) or change of beat, the chief drummer of each group with the assistance of the *Tammāttam* players change their beat either by

1. beating once again the *Hewisi Pirima* or
2. playing an intermediate *mātrā* (beat) to link the next beat with the *Hewisi mātrā* already played.

To illustrate, the 1st and the 27th *Gaman Hewisi mātrās* given above can be linked with an intermediate beat as follows:

1. Jen Jegak Jen/Takkata Tarikita
This beat is now joined with the intermediate beat

Intermediate beat

Jenga Jegak Jen/Tarikita Kurujen/
Tak Kitak Kata/Takkata Tarikita
and play the new beat

27. Donga Takka/Takka Takita

Thus the alternation of two *Gaman Hewisi Mātrās* with an intermediate rhythm adds much grace and beauty. March beats are also changed in the *Perahera* when the drummers pass a temple or a Deistic shrine. At these points the drummers beat a *Pūja Padē*, a beat of offering, and the commencement of the *Hewisi* is followed by a *Gaman Padē*.

Towards the end of the journey through the streets of Kandy, the *Perahera* drummers change this march beat at the end of the temple square connecting Deva Vidiya to Raja Vidiya near the President's lodge. At this point the drummers beat the *Valinade Hewisi* belonging to the *Hewisi Paha* or five *Hewis* of which the drum beats are as follows:

1. Tat jemita—jega jegak juga jej jek
Kada taka Jega juga juga jengak tarikita
Kadataka Jen gat tarikita kadataka
Jengak Jengada ta
2. Jen tak Kita jen gak Kita jen tak Kita
jenta kita kur jegita—Kita Kur jegita
Kita Kur jegita Kur juga jentak Kita
jenta—Kita Kur jehi Kur jenga
3. Tak Kit tat Kada Jen Kittak Kada jen
tarikita Kada Jen tatta—Kada jen gat
Kada jengat Kitta Kada taka tari jen
gat Jen gada ta
4. Tit tit tit tei—Jega Kita—Kiti taku
jitta Jega Kita Kiti taku jitta—jena Kita
Kiti taku jit jena Kita—Kiti taku
jit jena Kita—Kiti taku jitta
ta ta ta juga Kita Kiti taku jitta
5. Tit tit tit tit tei kada tak, kit tat
Kada taka tarikita Kita Kada taka
tarikita kittat Jen gada tā

In addition to the above, various repetitive melodic beats known as *Alankāra*

Pada can be played within the above drum beats to beautify. However, these *Valinade Hewisi* beats are now shortened for convenience. Examples:

1. Jen Jen Jen Kittak tarikita takata
2. Jen Jen Jen takudan Kita takuden
3. Jen Jen Jen Kittak Kitak/ / /
4. Jen Jen Jengak Jega Jen Kittak tarikita
5. Jengada Jen Jen Jen gak tarikita
Jen Jen Jen gak Jen Kittak tarikita

After beating **the *Hēwisipahe Hēwisi***, the drummers will now start beating in a very slow tempo (*Vilambalaya*), a *Hewisi* known as *Geveddum Hewisi* (retire drumming) which indicates that the *Perahera* is returning to its temple. The *Hewisi Padē* beaten at this moment is as follows:

<i>Daywula</i>	<i>Tammettama</i>
Jen Jen Jen	Kittak/Kitak/Kittak

Some times *Alankara Padas* are also beaten within this beat such as:

<i>Daywula</i>	<i>Tammettama</i>
Jen Jen Jen	Kittak/Kitak/Kadataka
Jen Jen Jen	Kittak/Kitak/ tarikita/domikita/ta
Jen Jen Jen	Kadataka/tarikita/domikita/ta Kittak/Kitak/Kittak/ Kitak/Kittak.

Here again various *Alankara Padas* are some times played but not usually.

The importance of the *Gaman Hewisi* is the different beats that are played according to the number of drum syllabics or *mātrās* contained in them. The role of the cymbal player amidst a group of drummers is that he keeps the *tāla* or time according to the number of *mātrās*. Thus the *Gaman Hewisi* has 1,2,3,4,5 *mātrās* and they are therefore called *Gaman Mātrās* or marching syllabics. The cymbal which is an accompaniment is a small pair of round flat brass plates. The sound that the two plates produce is *tit* and *tie*.

The *Horane kārāyā* or oboe player blows *astakas*, *gajaga vannama*, *Daladā Kavi*, *Sindu and Vannam* in the company of drummers. The social importance of the *Gaman Hewisi* as mentioned above was that it was used in taking the King and the warriors to the battle field. This is somewhat similar in use to the Western band to which sound the soldiers march. One such martial beat (*Rana-Bera*) used in the wars in the past was recorded by me in the Hatara Korale or Kegalle district. It is as follows:

Rajjen Kitakata Kukujen Kitakata
 Jen Jen gattak takkata jikkata tongada rarikita
 Jen Jen Kititaka/ / /
 Kunda Kunda Kitakata/ / /
 Titakata Titakata R.....R.....
 Rajjega jega takujega jega
 Rujen jega jegak Jega jega jen
 Kittak tarikita tat Kunndak gat tarikita
 Jen Jen Kititaka...../ / /
 Kunda Kunda Kititaka/ / /

In a funeral march of a king or in a funeral procession (*Ayamañgul* or *ādāhana Perahera*) in Anuradhapura in the event of a cremation of a dead branch of the Sacred Bodhi Tree (Sri Maha Bodhi) which is performed with high honour bestowed to a King in the past or in a funeral march of a Buddhist High Priest (Maha Nayaka Thera) or in the procession after the water cutting ceremony at Embekke Devale in Udu Nuwara at present the *Mala Bera Gasima* or beating of the dead drum can be heard. The beating of the *Dawula* and *Tammāttama* is done by covering each with a white piece of cloth. The *Horanāwa* accompanies the drum thus adding sorrow and loneliness (*pāluwa*). This drumming has a very slow beat with an interval of eight mātrās.

<i>Dawula</i>	<i>Tammāttama</i>
Jen gak Jen	Tak Tak Kititaka

This same beat is sometimes played as follows:-

<i>Dawula</i>	<i>Tammattama</i>
Jen gak Jen	Kitak kita

This long interval is now known as "*Solo Arinawa*" which means "playing slowly". To what extent the present art of drumming is corrupted is evident by the word "*Solo*" which is a Sinhalese derivation of the English word slow. The original name is *Kandilama*.

The Sinhala drum music at one time was a developed Art and now it is fast disappearing. Three reasons can be attributed to this. One is that there is no proper training given and the old masters or *gurus* belonging to various *Parampāras* or teacher traditions are gradually disappearing without imparting their knowledge. Secondly the younger generation does not take to their art or follow their parents in their profession as they think drumming is *infra dig* and take to other means of livelihood. Thirdly, tourism is destroying all art forms as most of the traditional artists now make their living by performing to the tourist without any knowledge or training. The patronage that the traditional artists used to enjoy in ancient society under a king or a village chief or a temple is no more.

Art and Artists are now in the free market and the artists themselves are responsible for the sustenance of their art and lives and no one else is responsible or concerned. This note on the *Gaman Hewisi pada* is therefore a record of ancient tradition to show what it was during a certain period.

REFERENCES

1. See for a detailed account on *Pancaturya Nada* and *The Hewisi Puja*. Anuradha Seneviratne—*Ethnomusicology*—Journal of the Society for Ethnomusicology. Vol. 23. No. 1. pp. 49-56 Michigan, 1979.
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